

West Box Elder Sage Grouse – Spring 2015

Project-

I am researching whether the on-going juniper removal program in the Park Valley area has increased sage-grouse vital rates (survival, nest success, brood success). To do this I am tracking approximately 45 sage-grouse through the breeding, nesting, and brood rearing (and winter via flights) seasons in order to record survival and success or failure by habitat type. I will also be doing pellet transects, and looking for sage-grouse pellets as proof-of-use in sagebrush, juniper invasion, and juniper removal areas.

Trapping-

I began trapping in late January, and finished on March 23rd. In that time, I captured 5 males and 25 females. Of those, I captured 9 total north of Park Valley, 9 southwest of Rosette, and 12 further south in dry basin. With the existing birds with active collars from 2014, I started with 47 total (10 males and 37 females). Since the beginning of March, 3 males and one female has died (possibly due to the unseasonable warmth, causing males to begin lekking earlier than normal). Of the remaining birds, one has moved to the north of Lynn, one is north of Grouse Creek, and one is going back and forth between Dry Basin and Badger Flats (Grouse Creek). I thank all of the landowners for their permission, and their patience as I spotlighted late at night – I know a couple folks got some “what’s going on?” calls.

General-

It appears (through observation – I have limited data currently) that hens immediately recognize juniper removal areas as usable habitat. I have flushed random hens in treatments, and a couple of my technicians regularly observe collared birds in treatment areas. Many of the treatment areas that are used have been treated within the last 3 (or so) years, including one in which treatment is still ongoing.

Nesting-

As of April 18th, I have 6 hens that have initiated a nest. One hen has already lost her nest, likely due to the windstorm that occurred during the week of April 13th. It appears that the sagebrush that she was under was crushed, and there was no evidence of predation (tracks, feathers, etc.) I am hoping that since she lost her nest so early, she may try again, but re-nesting attempts are rare in WBE.

Landowners-

I certainly appreciate the massive landowner interest and cooperation. I understand that I am just a guest, and I constantly remind my technicians of the same thing. If you have any issues, please contact me. If you would like an update about your land, don’t hesitate to call; ideally, my technicians or I will keep you in the loop if we cross paths.

I am truly thankful for everyone’s help!

Charles Sandford
505-412-3737
nmsuchuckles@gmail.com